

Two states brace for ISIS families' arrival

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A cohort of ISIS-linked Australians trapped in Syria would mostly end up in Victoria and NSW, according to new reports, should intelligence and law enforcement authorities allow them to be reintegrated into society.

On Monday, NSW Premier Chris Minns revealed about a third of the cohort could end up in NSW, though he flagged that number was subject to change.

“I don’t have a complete number on that because I’m just not sure about how many, if any, will eventually end up in New South Wales,” he said.

Most of the remaining members in the group would likely end up in Victoria, per a subsequent Herald Sun report.

While Victorian Premier Jacinta Allan confirmed Victorian officials were engaged with Commonwealth counterparts over the issue, she declined to go into specifics.



Future of ISIS brides in Aus revealed

“I am very clear that citizens have rights, but so to do the citizens of Victoria to have their safety protected.

Labor has repeatedly ruled out any efforts to repatriate the group – comprised of 11 women and 23 children – who are trying to escape the notorious al-Roj camp in Syria’s northeast.

The cohort made headlines last week after a failed attempt to return to Australia via Damascus revealed they held Australian passports and, as citizens, had the right to voluntarily re-enter the country.



Future of ISIS brides in Aus revealed

This week, the federal opposition confirmed it would table legislation to parliament to establish a criminal offence for assisting in the re-entry of people to Australia, who have committed terror-related offences, or been linked to terror hotspots or organisations.

But on Tuesday, the Prime Minister described the plan as “nonsense”, pointing to the constitutional issues of restricting the right of citizens to return home.

“There’s been some nonsense that was not thought through in order to get a headline from the Coalition,” Mr Albanese told the ABC.



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Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke has previously confirmed one of the 34 individuals has been handed a temporary exclusion order, banning them from entering Australia for up to two years.

Mr Burke told the ABC the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation had not assessed the remaining 33 Australians as a significant enough threat to national security to warrant exclusion orders.

On Tuesday, Mr Albanese was asked if the government was open to changing the threshold of these orders to stop terror-linked Australians from returning.

He said: “The full force of the law has been implemented to the extent that we can.”

“There are constitutional issues — the Coalition is conscious of that — which is why the laws that are operating are the laws that were put in place by the former government on the basis of the advice,” he said.



Future of ISIS brides in Aus revealed

“They’re the strongest laws that could possibly be actually implemented and not knocked over in the High Court.”

He later added: “I’m satisfied that every attempt has been made to put in place the strongest laws that are possible.”

But the Coalition has repeatedly attacked the Albanese government for a lack of transparency around the issue, with Nationals senator Matt Canavan claiming on Tuesday: “The government’s been hiding about this issue almost as well as an al-Qaeda cell would be hiding in the caves of Afghanistan.”

“They just won’t come out open the Australian public about what the hell is going on, and now we’re seeing trying to hide behind shield of the national interest.



Future of ISIS brides in Aus revealed

The Coalition's proposed changes would require express permission of the foreign affairs or home affairs ministers for humanitarian or security-based repatriation of terror-linked Australians.

The criminal offence would also capture organisations, not just individuals, who assist in re-entry, though details remain sparse on the scope of the offence, sparking fears it could capture charities working in war zones.

The cohort in question is among the thousands of ISIS-linked families forced to live in camps since the fall of the so-called Islamic State's territorial caliphate in 2019.

The conditions of camps in northeast Syria, including al-Roj, have been assessed by human rights organisations and the United Nations as inhumane.

As of 2023, the UN's special rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights has called on all nations to repatriate their citizens – especially women and children linked to ISIS – from camps and prisons, including in northeast Syria, to ensure their right to a fair judicial process.